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SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

All media (highlighted stories in The Jerusalem Post and Yediot) quoted Acting PM Ehud Olmert as saying during a meeting with Israeli President Moshe Katsav on Tuesday that he would be willing to begin final-status negotiations with PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas if the latter keeps his promise to dismantle the terrorist organizations. Yediot quoted Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, who will take over the foreign affairs portfolio today, as saying in an interview with the French daily Le Monde that the longer the conflict with the Palestinians lasts, the more time works in Israel's favor. Yediot wrote that Livni hinted in the interview that unilateral withdrawals could continue. Livni was quoted as saying that Israel must progress toward separation from the Palestinians by its own forces.

Hatzofe quoted diplomatic sources in Jerusalem as saying that the Olmert government may accept the election of Hamas representatives to the Palestinian government if PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas does not include Hamas representatives in the PA cabinet.

Maariv reported that intelligence that has reached Israel over the past few weeks indicates that Abbas suffers from depression and is unable to deal with the situation in the PA. The newspaper reported that PA Civilian Affairs Minister Muhammad Dahlan shouted at Abbas that he "was getting mad like Arafat." Ha'aretz reported that in a bid to attract voters, Hamas has moderated its platform for the Palestinian Legislative Council elections, approaching its stance to that of Fatah.

The Jerusalem Post quoted EU Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner as saying during a Jerusalem press conference Tuesday that the EU has held up a transfer of some 35 million euros to the PA until it meets certain criteria. The newspaper quoted EU officials as saying that the most serious criterion has to do with financial monitoring, auditing and "wage containment" -- meaning that more was paid in salaries than had been allocated.

All media quoted Olmert as saying during his meeting with Katsav with regard to Iran: "Israel cannot allow someone who has such evil intentions against us to have control over a destructive weapon that could threaten our existence." Olmert was referring to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's recent threats to "wipe Israel off the map." Yediot quoted IDF C-o-S Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz as saying in a lecture at Haifa University on Tuesday: "Iran is the only existential threat to Israel." In its lead story, Ha'aretz reported that Israel is in advanced talks with the U.S. and European countries over a package of sanctions that would be

applied against Iran should it continue its nuclear program. Ha'aretz reported that over the past two months, various Israeli agencies, under the guidance of an interministerial committee headed by Mossad Director Meir Dagan, have presented proposals for diplomatic and economic sanctions against Iran. Ha'aretz says that some of those ideas are: sanctions against Iranian oil exports; banning Iran's soccer team from the World Cup (a step also mentioned in other media); denying visas for foreign travel to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Iranian officials involved in the country's nuclear program; halting the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) technical cooperation with Iran on nuclear issues; and restricting landings by Iranian civilian aircraft. Ha'aretz cited the belief of Israeli officials that Russia will abstain in the IAEA vote on referring Iran to the Security Council, but that it will urge that action be postponed in order to give negotiations time.

The electronic media reported the results of Tuesday's Labor Party primaries: Knesset Member Yitzhak Herzog is the big winner in the contest and will be No. 2 on the party's list for the Knesset. MK Ophir Pines-Paz won the third spots on the list. The first place is guaranteed to Labor Chairman Amir Peretz.

Also in the top ten were Ben-Gurion University President Avishai Braverman, ex-Shin Bet chief Ami Ayalon, MK Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, MK Yuli Tamir, and journalist Shelly Yachimovich. Meimad leader Michael Melchior was given the tenth place on the list. The media reported that former cabinet ministers such as Matan Vilnai and Ephraim Sneh were relegated to lower spots. All media reported unconfirmed rumors that a deal had been concluded between Peretz and Knesset Member Binyamin Ben-Eliezer that was aimed at keeping people not associated with either camp off the slate. Israel Radio cited a response by the Kadima Party to the results that the Labor Party has become a branch of the Histadrut labor federation, whose Secretary-General is Peretz. Speaking on Israel Radio, Likud Knesset Member Gilad Erdan, who is No. 3 on his party's list, said that the Labor Party list was on the far left of Israeli politics. Major media reported that the police will check alleged forgeries in the Likud primaries.

Israel Radio reported that two IDF soldiers were wounded last night in an operation in Jenin. The station quoted Palestinian sources as saying that two Palestinians were also wounded in the clash.

Israel Radio and Ha'aretz's web site reported that this morning the government approved the nomination of three Kadima members to cabinet posts. MK Roni Bar-On becomes National Infrastructure Minister and Science Minister; Deputy Defense Minister Zeev Boim will be in charge of the Construction and Housing Ministry, as well as of the Agriculture Ministry; Deputy Internal Security Minister Jacob Edery will be Health Minister as well as Minister in charge of the development of the Negev and Galilee.

Maariv reported that Israel's National Security Council will present a position paper at the Sixth Herzliya Conference on the Balance of Israel's National Security, which takes place next week, recommending that 40,000 Israeli Bedouins be relocated from their "unrecognized" villages.

The Jerusalem Post reported that State Comptroller Micha Lindenstrauss told the newspaper on Tuesday that he took a grave view of the size of the donations former PM Shimon Peres received from three foreign contributors to help finance his primary campaign for leadership of the Labor Party.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the Physicians for Human Rights organization is demanding that the Prisons Service pay the USD 100,000 cost of a kidney transplant for Ahmed el-Tammi, a Palestinian terrorist serving a life sentence.

Leading media reported on Vice President Dick Cheney's meetings with Saudi and Egyptian leaders on Tuesday. Hatzofe stressed a remark made by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak during his meeting with Cheney that the West pounces on Iran but turns a blind eye to Israel's nuclear program.

Leading media reported that in Hebron on Tuesday, police arrested 12 teenagers, some of whom were not from Hebron, on suspicion of involvement in the rioting in the city over the past few days.

The Jerusalem Post reported that at a joint conference of 30 Israeli and Palestinian journalists that ended

Monday in Jordan, Palestinian journalists told their Israeli counterparts that, although their referring to a suicide bomber as shahid (martyr) would continue, there has been a perceptible change in their coverage of attacks inside Israel that reflects a recognition of such acts as terrorism and illegitimate.

The Jerusalem Post cited a study released Tuesday by a "liberal think tank," the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, according to which Israel and the Palestinians should allow the international community to supervise the Temple Mount and Jerusalem's other holy sites.

Maariv quoted Lebanese PM Fuad Siniora as saying in an interview with the Lebanese daily As-Safir that he prefers to die rather than sign a peace treaty with Israel. Siniora was quoted as saying that he would agree to a cease-fire with Israel only when the Golan is returned to Syria and a Palestinian state is established on Palestinian land. Siniora also reportedly expressed his support for Hizbullah.

Leading media cited a story published during the weekend in the German newspaper Koelner Stadtanzeiger that the German Federal Intelligence Service (BND) has provided the Mossad with German passports for carrying out missions in unnamed Middle East countries.

The Jerusalem Post cited a Tourism Ministry report that income from tourism reached USD 4.7 billion in 2005, an increase of 11 percent from the previous year spurred by the sharp rise in foreign visitors. The largest contingent of travelers came from the U.S., which brought in 450,000 travelers throughout the year, 20 percent more than in 2004. French tourists came second in the number of visitors.

Mideast:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Shimon Shiffer wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "[Olmert] will make every effort to reach far-reaching understandings with the U.S. administration and the Europeans. It is reasonable to assume that he has a detailed 'road map' of his own, which he will surely not present before the elections."

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "Israel is already installing its next political plan, according to which by the end of the decade, Israel will have pulled back to behind the fence in an agreement that it will make with the Americans, and not with the Palestinians."

Ghassan Khatib, the Palestinian Authority's Planning Minister, wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "[Israel's] attitude and behavior on the issue of elections in Jerusalem has been benefiting the Palestinian opposition and mainly Hamas."

Chief Economic Editor Sever Plotker opined in Yediot Aharonot: "The use that Hany Abu-Assad made of [his film] 'Paradise Now' ... gives it a further, dangerous dimension of indirect yet clear justification for the path of the suicide bombers."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "The reception accorded 'Paradise Now' reinforces the impression that, in the current global struggle against Islamist terrorism, our blood is somehow not as red as everyone else's."

Block Quotes:

I. "In Sharon's Shoes"

Diplomatic correspondent Shimon Shiffer wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (January 18): "If Ehud Olmert is elected prime minister, he will not pass up his right to make his mark and carry out a significant historical step. And when he speaks publicly today about the hope of reaching a final status arrangement with the Palestinians, this should be taken seriously. He too, like Sharon, will try to make important decisions in an effort to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Olmert will not change after the elections: his stance, in principle, is that Israel should try to shape its permanent borders on its own, while viewing the demographic component as the

most important factor. All this leads to the assessment that in the coming years we will face another disengagement and the evacuation of isolated settlements in the West Bank, while withdrawing to the final borders. This will happen either as part of an agreement with the Palestinian Authority or without an agreement, with the support of the international community.... [Olmert] will make every effort to reach far-reaching understandings with the U.S. administration and the Europeans. It is reasonable to assume that he has a detailed 'road map' of his own, which he will surely not present before the elections. Olmert will not act on his own. Tzipi Livni, who will assume the post of foreign minister today, is expected to be a loyal -- and opinionated -- partner to the view that Israel must withdraw from most of the territories, if it wishes to preserve the state as a Jewish and democratic entity. She intends to turn the Foreign Ministry into a significant factor in the decision making process, and will carry out widespread personnel changes, which she describes in private conversations as the 'big bang.'"

II. "The Collapse of the 'Rais'"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (January 18): "Intelligence accumulated in Israel over recent weeks indicates that Abu Mazen is ... losing control over the situation, has lost trust in his people, is sinking deep into depression and that the PA is very close to complete governmental collapse. In this situation, Israeli political and security officials are calling to prepare for a situation in which there is no partner on the other side and Israel should take measures that are coordinated with the world in general and with the United States in particular.... The collapse of Abu Mazen's government is especially dangerous in light of the statements, policy and vision of President Bush for the Middle East. The difficulties in Iraq continue to increase, Osama bin Laden is going about freely, and currently the Palestinian Authority, too, is about to fall into the hands of fundamentalist terrorist organizations. Washington fears that this situation will lead to a complete collapse of American policy in the Middle East and make a mockery of the President. And the crisis is especially severe in light of the high hopes that the Americans had for Abu Mazen, who is thought to be the only Arab leader who at a certain point came close to the status that the Americans have given only to King Abdullah of Jordan and to his father before him, King Hussein. As of now, Abu Mazen looks like a has-been. The intelligence and security communities of Israel, the United States and other countries describe Gaza even now as 'no-man's land'.... Israel is already installing its next political plan, according to which by the end of the decade, Israel will have pulled back to behind the fence in an agreement that it will make with the Americans, and not with the Palestinians."

III. "Undermining the Peace Camp"

Ghassan Khatib, the Palestinian Authority's Planning Minister, wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (January 18): "The irony ... is that [Israel's] attitude and behavior on the issue of elections in Jerusalem has been benefiting the Palestinian opposition and mainly Hamas. Firstly, discriminating against Hamas and opposition candidates or preventing campaigning in Jerusalem because Hamas is taking part in elections simply serves to single out Hamas and thus increase its public support. Secondly, the fact that the PA hasn't been able to guarantee the right of its citizens to participate in elections in Jerusalem has been portrayed as a sign of weakness of the PA. One of the possible outcomes is a low turnout among the general public in East Jerusalem. This can also be expected to be unfavorable to moderate parties. But this is consistent with Israeli positions and practices throughout last year, which have negatively affected the public image of the PA and the moderate leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas."

IV. "Road to Paradise Is Paved With Bad Intentions"

Chief Economic Editor Sever Plotker opined in Yediot Aharonot (January 18): "The film 'Paradise Now,' about the Palestinian Islamic suicide bombers, won the Golden Globe award in Hollywood as best foreign language film. More precisely -- and accuracy is important here -- the choice was made by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, not by the American press. I watched the ceremony for awarding the prize to 'Paradise Now.' It infuriated and upset me. I was angry when the hosts giving the award opened the envelope and declared the

winning country: 'Palestine.' To the best of my knowledge, there is no state called 'Palestine'.... After the name of the winning film and its country of origin were read out loud, the director Hany Abu-Assad took the Hollywood stage and gave a political-nationalist-Palestinian speech. He did not use the international limelight in order to speak about the aspiration for peace and/or to direct an emotional call to Muslim youth the world over to abandon the path of terrorism and suicide bombings. Neither did Hany Abu-Assad speak about reconciliation and compromise. He voiced his hope that now the entire world will identify with the Palestinian hope for a state that would be established 'unconditionally'.... The use that Hany Abu-Assad made of 'Paradise Now' as a lever for Palestinian national propaganda wrongs the content of the film, renders it superficial and gives it a further, dangerous dimension of indirect yet clear justification for the path of the suicide bombers.... 'Paradise Now' ... is not a Palestinian propaganda film.... But this is not about the film, it is about the film's award ceremony.... In effect, the Golden Globe Awards established the Palestinian state by virtue of the words of a director and a foreign press association."

IV. "Humanizing Terrorism"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (January 18): "We don't believe that those who decided to honor [the Golden Globe award-winning film] 'Paradise Now' necessarily wished to glorify suicide bombers or justify those who target Israeli civilians. Yet we find it unlikely a film delving into the inner struggles of the terrorists who brought down the World Trade Center or who murdered in London, Madrid, Baghdad or Bali will be produced, let alone showered with the same accolades. The reception accorded 'Paradise Now' reinforces the impression that, in the current global struggle against Islamist terrorism, our blood is somehow not as red as everyone else's.... 'Paradise Now' humanizes mass murderers even more forthrightly, and to a much wider audience. Those who would heap awards on such a film should, even if they are unconcerned by the sensibilities of Israelis, consider whether they would make the same choice if they -- their nation or their families -- were the victims."

JONES